

Experimenting with the Architecture of Jewish Education: Building Blocks for Next Decade Models

**Cyd B. Weissman, Director, Innovation in Congregational Learning, BJENY/SAJES of
Greater New York
and
Rob Weinberg, Experiment in Congregational Education, Rhea Hirsch School of
Education, HUC-JIR/Los Angeles**

In their article titled, “Awakening of Faith in an Alternative Future,” Senge et al (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004) talk about having experienced “extraordinary moments of collective presence or awakening, and seen the consequent shift of large social systems.” They describe one such moment of recognition:

Today, for example, it’s possible to enter an urban school in China or India or Brazil and immediately recognize a way of organizing education that has become completely taken for granted in the West. Students sit passively in separate classrooms. Everything is coordinated by a predetermined plan, with bells and whistles marking time, and tests and grades to keep things moving like one giant assembly line. Indeed, it was the assembly line that inspired the industrial-age school design, with the aim of producing a uniform, standardized product as efficiently as possible. Though the need to encourage thoughtful, knowledgeable, compassionate global citizens in the twenty-first century differs profoundly from the need to train factory workers in the nineteenth century, the industrial-age school continues to expand, largely unaffected by the new realities within which children are growing up in the present day. (p. 7-8)

Similarly, in congregational education, we daily reproduce an industrial-age educational model, borrowed from secular education and overlaid onto Jewish learning. The mental model of religious school or Hebrew school has become so prevalent as to be invisible and unquestioned. That is until recently. Growing numbers of congregational educators, rabbis, and lay leaders can see the need for a shift—can see the paradigm and recognize that it no longer fits today’s realities or the needs to today’s learners. Recognizing that the majority of children in the United States who receive any Jewish education receive it in this industrial age model (Wertheimer, A Census of Jewish Supplementary Schools in the United States 2006–2007, 2008), these congregations are not satisfied either to accept the status quo or to seek to address in turn each of the many obstacles facing the prevalent supplementary education model (for one recitation of obstacles see Wertheimer, 2009 p. xii-xiii) in hopes of improving it. Rather, they are fundamentally questioning the overall model of supplementary schooling. They are experimenting actively and continually with new models, which they have designed with new assumptions, new visions, and new goals.

Though a few accounts of new models are available (Weinberg, 2008) (Wertheimer, Learning and Community, 2009) we know of no prior systematic analysis of the emerging common



A beneficiary agency of
UJA Federation
of New York



The Experiment in Congregational Education
A Project of The Rhea Hirsch School of Education
Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion/Los Angeles
www.econline.org

Leadership Institute
FOR CONGREGATIONAL SCHOOL EDUCATION

A joint program of Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion and the Jewish Theological Seminary
Funded by UJA Federation of New York

characteristics of such models that might inform other congregations' efforts at innovation and further experimentation among innovating congregations. We analyzed the innovative models developed by 23 congregations in the Greater New York Area that had participated in The RE-IMAGINE Project, sponsored by UJA-Federation of New York and conducted by the Experiment in Congregational Education, an initiative of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education, HUC-JIR/Los Angeles. Now part of a growing Coalition of Innovating Congregations, each of these congregations—equipped with process tools and consultation as well as a belief that change was both necessary and possible—developed a vision for Jewish learning, a set of priority goals for learners, and implemented at least one new model and, in some cases, several. Our analysis reveals seven design characteristics—each shared to varying degrees by these congregations' innovative models—that can serve as building blocks for new models as innovation spreads more widely and deeply among congregations seeking to create Jewish learning that makes a positive difference in learners.

Models, Not Programs

Jewish educators have always invested significant energy in creating quality programming, and yet the sum of such efforts has often fallen short. Limitations of the current model have caused best-laid plans for quality programs to meet with limited success. Retention rates beyond B'nai Mitzvah remain distressingly low. Programs are but small-scale manifestations of the surrounding model in which they are embedded. Its limits constrain their potential. So it is important for next-decade designers of Jewish learning to differentiate a model from a program. “Program” describes the “interior” experience that takes place within the fixed architecture of a model. Programs tend to be more theme- content- or activity-based than models. The Israel Day program and the family education program are examples of programs because their delivery is episodic and finite. In contrast, “model” describes the outer architecture that provides the fixed structure or configuration within which the learning experience or program takes place.

The conventional model of part-time supplementary education is easily recognizable by its outer architecture. No one would mistake it for a program. Like other models, it responds to the questions: Who are the learners? Who are the teachers? When does learning take place? Where does learning take place? Why does learning take place? In response to these inquiries, the conventional school model asserts that children are the learners; part-time employees with little professional development (and often little prior training) are the teachers; and learning takes place in classrooms on weekday afternoons and Sundays. Although the espoused response to why is learning taking place may be to build Jewish knowledge or identity, the expressed response is often to prepare a child to participate in bar/bat mitzvah and specific Jewish holiday observances.

Innovating congregations—such as those whose models we analyzed—are creating new answers to the questions that define a model. They are uncovering the building blocks of an architecture that can house learning experiences that make a positive and significant difference in learners.

Evolving Visions and Models Based on New Questions

The 23 congregations we studied—along with other innovators in other communities—have launched new models of Jewish education specifically designed to help learners grow, rooted in Jewish tradition, with an evolving sense of meaning and purpose. Each experiment has brought



A beneficiary agency of
UJA-Federation
of New York



The Experiment in Congregational Education
A Project of The Rhea Hirsch School of Education
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion/Los Angeles
www.econline.org

Leadership Institute
FOR CONGREGATIONAL JEWISH EDUCATION

A joint program of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and the Jewish Theological Seminary
Funded by UJA-Federation of New York

congregations closer to their visions. Hard won insights have also stretched congregations to some degree to alter initial pictures of the future. When they uncover answers to questions like “What really engages families?,” “What Jewish learning affects real living?,” and “What do we know now that we couldn’t have possibly known before?,” then visions evolve. Each year’s launch has resulted in more vivid pictures of what is possible and what is necessary. As we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century, we have the opportunity to learn from these early innovators.

Continual Experimentation Based on New Assumptions

The congregational schooling paradigm has dominated—even embodied—our collective mental model of Jewish education for a majority of Jewish children for over a century. In our rapidly changing times we should not expect that any one model will emerge as the prevalent model for all learners, or that any one model that emerges in the next few years will last another fifty to a hundred years. Rather we should expect the shelf life of new models to be considerably shorter. Changes in our economy, society, religious landscape, technology, families, and cultures are coming too quickly. Continual experimentation is the constant that will create and elaborate successive models that earn a reputation for making a positive difference in learners’ lives.

In innovating congregations, collaborative leadership teams that include clergy, educational directors, lay leaders, teachers, and learners lead steady streams of experiments. These teams prioritize resources (i.e. financial, staff, space) for innovation, and challenge long-standing assumptions that hold the model of part-time Jewish education in stasis. In the past, those seeking improvement in congregational education primarily directed change toward improving and expanding programming, curriculum, and teacher learning. The conventional model of part-time education remained generally fixed, in part, because of commonly held assumptions that limit imagination about alternative approaches. Limiting assumptions include: parents won’t regularly engage in Jewish experience; soccer is a family’s priority; school is the only paradigm to educate children; and education is a low priority for the congregation. Today’s innovators challenge these beliefs and launch small experiments proving these assumptions false. A new set of assumptions now directs their actions.

Today, congregational leaders risk creating new models because they hold beliefs like: the congregation’s vitality is dependent upon high quality engagement of children and families; it takes models centered in life—not in a classroom alone—to exert powerful influence on identity; and families are deeply committed to raising children with Jewish roots and values. Experiments grounded in these new assumptions result in models of part-time Jewish experience that are significantly different than the traditional 60-180 hour a year classroom drop off model. Early experiments form the groundwork for more advanced next-decade experimentation.

We fully expect that the next ten years will generate bolder, more expansive, and more fully systemic models than the current innovative experiments. Models for 2011 and beyond will benefit from insights, failures and accomplishments of the early innovators. By naming the design attributes that characterize early emerging models this article will equip tomorrow’s designers to draw on the body of work produced by congregational education innovators in the New York area.



A beneficiary agency of
UJA Federation
of New York



The Experiment in Congregational Education
A Project of The Rhea Hirsch School of Education
Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion/Los Angeles
www.econline.org

Leadership Institute
FOR CONGREGATIONAL JEWISH EDUCATION
A joint program of Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion and the Jewish Theological Seminary
Endowed by UJA Federation of New York

Whole Person Learning

Innovating congregations believe new models must support learners in more than acquiring knowledge, feeling good, or preparing for special events. These congregations set goals that focus on supporting the learner on a journey that helps the individual grow with knowledge, skills, a sense of belonging, and value/belief system. The Coalition of Innovating Congregations refers to this as “whole person” learning. Jewish educators often set “building Jewish identity” as their goal. Steven M. Cohen points out that “sociologists of religious identity speak of the three B’s: Belief, Behavior, and Belonging.” (Cohen, 2008). Knowledge surely serves as an indispensable basis for the three B’s. Together they address the whole person—the head (knowledge acquisition), the hand (behavior/action), the heart (beliefs and values), and the feet (belonging, i.e. where and with whom we stand).

The new architectures for learning that congregations are creating facilitate a kind of learning that enables a student to grow connected to self and to the larger community, equipped with an ability to draw on the three B’s and knowledge to live a full life. Judaism is a path to a meaningful and purposeful life. Clearly classroom-based academic learning alone cannot be the sole path. Its modalities are rarely rich enough to carry the full weight and potency required for whole person learning. Rather, new architectures—new models—that can function as full partners in achieving these goals are just beginning to be created. The work of pioneering congregations has uncovered seven building blocks that can form the foundation for next-decade models.

Seven Building Blocks for Twenty First Century Models

Twenty-first century models provide new answers to questions about educational architecture. Like a Rubik’s Cube, congregations use identifiable building blocks in various combinations to create the architectures of new models. Defining a distinctive Jewish educational architecture, seven building blocks have emerged from early experiments:

1. Regular engagement of parent/caregiver as well as the child;
2. Learning in real life settings;
3. Integrating children’s Jewish learning experience with the larger congregation’s values and practices;
4. Connections with the larger community;
5. New Teacher roles and expectations;
6. Relationships among peers and across generations; and
7. Choices for the learner.

Table 1 shows the number of New York area congregations whose new models incorporate each of these building blocks. A more detailed description of each building block and examples of how congregations are using them follows.

[Insert Table 1 Here]

The following sections of this paper explicate each of the seven building blocks in turn, exploring the rationale and offering examples of their application in New York area innovating congregations.



A beneficiary agency of
UJA Federation
of New York



The Experiment in Congregational Education
A Project of The Rhea Hirsch School of Education
Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion/Los Angeles
www.econline.org

Leadership Institute
FOR CONGREGATIONAL SCHOOL EDUCATION
A joint program of Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion and the Jewish Theological Seminary
Funded by UJA Federation of New York

Building Block One: Regular Engagement Of Parent/Caregiver And Child.

Early innovators have fully acknowledged that congregational education cannot, under any circumstances, be the sole vehicle that prepares children to self-direct a lifelong journey of Jewish engagement. A few hours a week in a classroom cannot usher a child into Jewish adulthood. As Rabbi Alan Lucas said “the old model of dropping your child off to Hebrew School and picking them up a few years later with the assumption that they will turn them into Jews doesn’t work.” (The Jewish Week, 2009) The drop-off model implies either that parents can absent themselves while the school provides what children need or that parents already actively model, teach and engage in Jewish life with their children outside the confines of the school. In today’s environment the former assumptions are far more likely to be true than the latter. Knowing that family engagement is essential, new models structure learning that fully engages children *and* parents as learners. Eighteen of the 23 congregations we studied are taking demonstrable steps to engage parents and/or families regularly.

Abundant research (see, e.g. Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006; Benson, 2006), not whimsy, has convinced innovating congregations that they must create structures that engage families in Jewish living and learning regularly. They know that “The best predictor of what the religious and spiritual lives of youth will look like is what the religious and spiritual lives of their parents look like.” (The Lookstein Center, 2010) Therefore, new models structure time to engage families on a regular basis. Regular engagement of families can be defined as parents and children coming together, typically in the synagogue, on Shabbat, holidays, and/or at other times. In practice, regularized engagement ranges from twice monthly to weekly. This contrasts to models of family education in which parents participate in structured experiences once to a few times a year. Twenty first century models shift family engagement from episodic calendared events to a natural family rhythm in sync with Jewish time.

For example, a model at North Shore Jewish Center, a Conservative congregation on Long Island with 150 K-11 students, engages families according to the rhythm of Jewish holidays. Parents participate with their children in two learning sessions prior to a holiday and then celebrate the holiday together. This cycle repeats for each grade three times a year. Other models involve parents with their children in regular *tikkun olam* activities in the synagogue or the surrounding community. Other models regularly engage families outside of the synagogue or seek to balance time spent in communal engagement with time spent in more private space by structuring learning and activities in the home. Forest Hills Jewish Center, a Conservative congregation in Queens with 135 K-12 students, for example, supports teachers in creating curriculum that “reaches into the home.” Classroom learning in this model requires home follow up. Teachers structure home family conversations, weekly Torah Study, family interviews, treasure hunts and other learning and celebrating activities that serve as either pre-learning or practice of what is learned in the classroom structure. In this way the home becomes the learning and living lab that supports classroom experience. The congregation empowers and equips parents to engage as both learners and teachers within the comfort of their home space and own time.

Reform Temple of Forest Hills, also in Queens with 140 pre-K-12 aged students, intentionally fosters home learning via home journals, gifts of Jewish ritual objects, and “Family Table Talk”



A beneficiary agency of
UJA Federation
of New York



Leadership Institute
FOR CONGREGATIONAL JEWISH EDUCATION
A joint program of Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion and the Jewish Theological Seminary
Funded by UJA Federation of New York

Torah study materials. These objects and activities structure home time as Jewish learning and living time. Structured home time can honor the stress of family calendars while still actively engaging parents and children together. This structure engages parents more flexibly than requiring them to participate on certain dates and times on the calendar. Engaging parents does not just mean bringing them to the synagogue or the larger community. Nine of the 23 congregations we studied offer some kind of support for learning in the home and at least five of congregations actively support parents as teachers. Thinking more expansively about how to engage families on their own time and space seems an opportunity for future experimentation. Congregations that make engaging parents a centerpiece of their new models, structure learning time in a number of ways. Most mix time in which adults and children each learn on their own levels with some joint learning encounters. Conventional family education often programs for parents by grade, i.e. offering a certain number of family education days per year for parents of children in each grade. Parents who have more than one child typically find grade-based family education problematic. They find themselves over-calendared trying to attend all their children's "events," they find they attend repeated programs over the years, and they find that such events tend to divide up the family rather than bringing it together. One New York area congregation that has successfully launched six family programs for each grade now reports parental concern about repetition and calendar clutter. A parent with three children can participate in synagogue life almost weekly and yet be experiencing disconnected family time and learning.

In lieu of grade-based family education, some congregations are trying to engage the whole family as an alternative to grade-based family education. Instead of parents coming to specific events for their "child's class," whole family engagement supports parents and children of different ages in Jewish learning and living. West End Synagogue, a Reconstructionist synagogue with 40 K-7 students in Manhattan is one congregation that arranges family Shabbat dinners in congregants' homes. They group whole families into *havurot* of ten families by their geographic location rather than by the grades children attend. West End Synagogue also structures whole family participation in *Tikkun Olam* activities and holiday celebrations. Rather than parents calendaring a certain number of events for each child, the whole family moves together in a Jewish rhythm. Whole family engagement may result in parents engaging on the same number of occasions as they would with grade-based family engagement, but whole family engagement strives to build family time, a rare and precious commodity in this decade. Although congregations using the whole family approach typically structure some time for children and adults to learn separately, whole family engagement can put an extra burden on educators who must create differentiated learning within a single time and setting. Educators who apply the whole family model must learn to practice principles of inter-generational education to ensure that shared time with multiple generations feels worthwhile and achieves identified learning goals. While whole family learning presents a challenge to educators to design learning that balances group and individual needs, it also provides regular quality family Jewish time.

No one should think that the congregations who are experimenting with engaging families regularly are responding to parents knocking on the door, saying "We want more." Rather, engagement becomes possible because these congregations create forums for parents to give voice to their hopes and dreams for their children. Repeatedly, these congregations hear parents,



A beneficiary agency of
UJA Federation
 of New York



The Experiment in Congregational Education
 A Project of The Rhea Hirsch School of Education
 Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion/Los Angeles
www.econline.org

Leadership Institute
 FOR CONGREGATIONAL SCHOOL EDUCATION

A joint program of Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion and the Jewish Theological Seminary
 Funded by UJA Federation of New York

when asked, express commitment to their children growing Jewish lives. Parents also reveal that they feel shackled by demands and stresses of everyday life. For example, Nancy Parkes, Educational Director of Temple Israel Center (TIC) a Conservative congregation in White Plains, asked parents to express their “Je(wish)es” for their children. Parents responded with heartfelt desires. They also expressed the stresses and challenges that make it difficult to fulfill those wishes. Both wishes and challenges formed a foundation on which to attract parents to engage more actively in their children’s Jewish educations. Buoyed by emerging partnerships with parents, congregations like TIC and Temple Beth Sholom of Roslyn Heights—a Long Island Conservative congregation with 373 K-12 students—are creating models that engage parents. Not every parent is asking for more. But a small core is demonstrating interest in enacting their roles as Jewish learners and partners in their children’s learning. Models that have emerged in the past decade have been built on the belief that engaging parents regularly and meaningfully is both necessary and possible.

Building Block Two: Situating Learning in Real Life Settings

Time spent in congregational school represents one of the most, if not the greatest, amount of time many children spend with structured Jewish experience on a weekly basis. For these children, Judaism is defined in large measure by a classroom experience. Many innovating congregations—including all but one of the 23 congregations whose models we analyzed, are re-balancing a child’s Jewish encounter to include less Jewish school time and more Jewish living time.

Shabbat and holidays have become a primary setting for new models. By using Jewish experience, Jewish time, Jewish place, and Jewish community as the mediators of knowledge, belief, belonging and action, congregations are exchanging the architecture of the classroom for space and time carved out by Jewish tradition.

The Reconstructionist Synagogue of the North Shore, a Long Island congregation with 180 K-12 students, for example, re-balances class time and real world Jewish time with the structure of *B’Yachad*. Children in this model attend class one afternoon a week throughout the month. Three times a month on Shabbat (one Friday night and two Saturday mornings) they also participate in grade-based learning, *minyan*, Torah study and *kiddush*. Their parents participate in *B’yachad* twice a month on Shabbat as well. Classroom time during the week and on Shabbat builds social connections among students and builds skills that children use during *minyanim* and Shabbat rituals. Children become immersed in the sounds, skills, smells, tastes and spirit of communal Shabbat celebration. The facts that they learn, they also live.

Real life Jewish settings like Shabbat, holidays, home celebration, and community social action provide live experience of Judaism, in ways that a school with desks, long hallways, computers, engaging activities and blackboards cannot. Children learn by authentic doing. Shabbat and real time settings allow students to see that what they learn does not just prepare them for an event, but supports a regular way of living. Situating learning within a visible community (see Building Blocks 3 and 4 below) and real time sends a message to children that what they are learning matters; it is valued by others whom they care about, and is worthy of their time, energy, and emotional, intellectual, and spiritual investment.



A beneficiary agency of
UJA Federation
of New York



The Experiment in Congregational Education
A Project of The Rhea Hirsch School of Education
Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion/Los Angeles
www.econline.org

Leadership Institute
FOR CONGREGATIONAL SCHOOL EDUCATION

A joint program of Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion and the Jewish Theological Seminary
Funded by UJA Federation of New York

Twenty first century models that structure learning time within real life settings like Shabbat and/or holiday settings also provide age-based skills instruction. These models reduce—but do not extinguish—book, pen and paper time. They increase time in real life settings. They *rebalance* learning “about” Judaism with learning by living Judaism. Learning to swim by reading a book is insufficient. Not until one enters the water does anything they’ve read make sense or have much purpose. A model *seder* in school with classmates is qualitatively different than experiencing a real *seder* on the night of Passover when Jews around the world celebrate with family and friends.

Real-life, joyful, communal, meaningful Jewish experience becomes essential when a key goal of congregational life is to spark each child’s desire and ability to belong and live connected to Judaism. Innovating congregations have worked hard to articulate measurable outcomes for learners. They speak of enabling children “be on a spiritual journey rooted in Jewish tradition,” “grow in a relationship to Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael,” “develop a moral compass that guides mending the world,” or “apply Torah to daily life.” Each one of these lifelong outcomes has meaning at its core. Innovating congregations know that learners need knowledge and skill, but that they are not sufficient. When a child moves into adulthood it is not enough for them to be able to recite and define a prayer. They have to have developed prayerful lives that they can express and explore within the *keva* of our tradition. But without also attending to the *kavanah*—the desire and intention—congregations know they fall short. So congregations, none of whom yet know the answer, are experimenting with an architecture that fosters understanding, reflection, values and most definitely, experience. Reciting Shabbat blessings on Sunday is not the same as singing those blessings on Shabbat in real time at a Shabbat table. Carr et al state: “Research supports the notion that meaning is made through authentic experience. Meaning results from cognitive and social activity that is intended to fulfill a purpose...meaning accrues from authentic activity, that is constructing and using knowledge to fulfill some purpose...an authentic goal can only be understood through use in some authentic activity which changes the user’s view of the world by adopting a belief system of the culture in which it is used.” (Carr, Jonassen, Marra, & Litzinger, 1998) When students’ learning takes place within a real Jewish encounter, rather than a practice run for an event that may or may not happen, the opportunity increases for personalization and transfer of knowledge to real life. Real life settings supported by classroom learning, further these outcomes.

To equip learners with the knowledge and skills to participate in authentic Jewish experience, some congregations structure home time for more skill-based learning. They often use the computer as a medium for learning basic skills like decoding Hebrew. As we move further into a technological age, one can imagine that online programs, *hevruta* learning by phone, or tutoring through Skype will increasingly support learning of basics such as decoding Hebrew. Skills learned at home through technology or with a tutor, can then be applied in authentic Jewish living situations like prayer services, holiday celebrations, Torah reading, and *tikkun olam* experiences. As of now, technological support for skills-based learning remains an area for future development; few congregations have well developed tools or approaches.



A beneficiary agency of
UJA Federation
 of New York



The Experiment in Congregational Education
 A Project of The Rhea Hirsch School Of Education
 Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion/Los Angeles
www.econline.org

Leadership Institute
 FOR CONGREGATIONAL SCHOOL EDUCATION

A joint program of Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion and the Jewish Theological Seminary
 Endowed by UJA Federation of New York

Finally, innovating congregations are also shifting how they use class time toward pre- and post-learning for real Jewish living. West End Synagogue, for example, uses their one-day-a-week class to prepare children to participate in the Jewish experience of the week. Then, when children return following that experience, they use class time to reflect on their Jewish experience. Following a pattern of learn, do, reflect, grounds the learning in effective constructivist educational practice. Just learning about a subject is not sufficient. Just having an experience is not sufficient. But a thoughtful balance of learning, doing, and reflecting generates deep and meaningful learning.

Building Block 3: Integrating Children's Jewish Learning Experience With The Larger Congregation's Values And Practices.

In the last century in America synagogues have developed with their schools segmented from the rest of the congregation. Members pay dues to belong to the congregation and then, in most cases, pay additional tuition to send their children to Religious/Hebrew School. This financial structure sends the message that schooling is “extra” and not part and parcel of synagogue membership. Synagogue boards talk about how the congregation “subsidizes” the school, as if the school were a separate entity. Although many congregations now afford their lead educator a title like Director of Congregational Learning, many still retain the Religious School Principal title, which supports the image of the school as a freestanding institution. The resulting organizational fragmentation has reinforced a model of Jewish education in which children learn *about* Judaism, rather than living Judaism within a community that practices and values what children are taught.

The very architecture of synagogues supports the fragmentation of children's experience from larger community's vibrancy. Children's learning often takes place in a separate wing of the building with a separate entrance, is hidden in the basement, or ensconced on a separate floor away from the congregation's main offices, social halls, and worship spaces; detached from the sight, sounds, flavors and practices of the larger community. School offices, too, reside close to classrooms, away from the main action of the rest of the congregation. So whether one examines the finances, organization charts, or architecture of the modern synagogue, they all express and reinforce a mental model that distances children's learning from the larger congregation.

Twenty-first century children spend most of their waking hours distanced from a “norming” community of living Judaism. A norming community can be understood as a group of adults and peers that value and strive to live the norms, values and rituals a child is taught. The community is an essential ingredient when trying to bring a child into the practices of a group that is different than the larger society (Aron, *The Malaise of Jewish Education*, 1989); (Woocher, 1995 p. 33). The vast majority of children from liberal Jewish households live their lives immersed in communities that affirm the values and practices of American secular life. Public school, after school activities, and the media assure that children learn the values of the broader secular culture. Where is the community that lives and honors Jewish values? The Jewish neighborhood that once served as a model for Jewish living is more rare than common for today's children.



A beneficiary agency of
UJA Federation
of New York



The Experiment in Congregational Education
A Project of The Rhea Hirsch School Of Education
Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion/Los Angeles
www.econline.org

Leadership Institute
FOR CONGREGATIONAL JEWISH EDUCATION

A joint program of Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion and the Jewish Theological Seminary
Funded by UJA Federation of New York

Recognizing that the vast majority of children live without a community that is Jewishly normative, 17 of the 23 innovating congregations we studied seek to turn the larger synagogue into a compelling “neighborhood” of Jewish norms. To do so, they structure Jewish educational models that intentionally connect children’s experiences to the practices and values of the larger congregation. Community Synagogue of Rye (CSR), a Reform congregation in Westchester County with 302 K-12 students, for example, formed a governance structure charged with connecting the centers of congregational and educational life for children and adults. CSR always held religious school on Shabbat. But prior to creating a 21st century model, the children’s experience had little connection to the larger congregation. Although children were dropped off at synagogue and shared time and space with the adult community, they shared little else. Prior to advent of the new model, parents came occasionally to see their children “perform.” The curriculum used a “cover the subjects” approach and focused mostly on b’nai mitzvah preparation.

For the past five years, CSR has been creating a model that connects children and families in time, space, and content to the larger congregational community. CSR defines themselves as a “Shabbat centered congregation” (Community Synagogue of Rye) where a high level of regular congregational engagement occurs on Shabbat. In a model they call J-Life, CSR engages families in learning and a meal on Shabbat four times a year for each grade, and then supports continued home learning and practice. Additionally, CSR encourages parents to “Attend the monthly family Shabbat worship service and holiday celebrations with your children...Observe Shabbat and other Jewish holidays and festivals at home; Reinforce the lessons taught at Religious School as you do for your children’s secular lessons; Make religious education an important priority.” (Community Synagogue of Rye)

To integrate J-Life with the larger experience of the congregation’s Shabbat life, CSR formed a “Community Learning Council.” The governance structure includes members from across the congregation and is charged with nurturing program, process and resources for a Shabbat-centered community that fosters lifelong meaningful learning. By trying to align all parts of the congregational system to its stated goals, this governance group practices vision driven decision making. One example of their commitment to lifelong learning in a Shabbat centered community is the congregation’s weekly Shabbat adult Torah study. According to the Community Learning Council, adult education—like children’s education—focuses on connecting learning and living. A written description of adult learning at CSR articulates its purpose as “enriching our soul and challenging our mind through Judaism. How can we enhance our lives and make our relationships stronger? How do we find meaning in the events of the day and the world? How do we become active learners and meaningful participants in our lives?” Education for children reflects the same values and goals: “Learners at Community Synagogue will be on a journey of applying Torah to daily life. Learners will develop knowledge, the sense of belonging, as well as values, beliefs and actions that enable the learner to make daily decisions in a way that is guided by Jewish teaching.” (Community Synagogue of Rye) The goals for and experiences of children’s Jewish learning and living are intentionally tied to the goals and experiences of the adult community.



A beneficiary agency of
UJA Federation
 of New York



The Experiment in Congregational Education
 A Project of The Rhea Hirsch School of Education
 Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion/Los Angeles
www.econline.org

Leadership Institute
 FOR CONGREGATIONAL SCHOOL EDUCATION

A joint program of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and the Jewish Theological Seminary
 Founded by UJA-Federation of New York

Linking their experience and learning to the larger congregation benefits children and families when they experience a community that values and models what is learned. It also benefits the health of the congregation. Congregations that operate as fragmented organizations, operating disparate tracks, find themselves at a loss to achieve their mission. When, on the other hand, a congregation works with all parts supporting a common vision they are likely to be able to achieve their stated goals.

According to Aron, Cohen, Hoffman and Kelman (2009), “visionary” congregations are more effective (than “functional” ones) at leaving an indelible impression on their congregants’ lives. Visionary congregations share a constellation of characteristics including linking the experience of children and family learning to the greater congregation. “In communities operating in a holistic fashion, worship services, involvement with one’s child’s religious education, caring for others, adult education, and social justice initiatives all serve as portals of entry into increased congregational engagement.” (p. 17) In educational models that link children’s and parents’ learning to the community neighborhood, learners experience congregational values, language, and practices as normative rather than peripheral to their lives. The congregational community serves as the living context for children’s learning. An educational structure that connects children and families to the larger congregation heals fragmentation, replacing it with an integrated, focused and vision driven congregation that has an increased chance of impacting the lives of its congregants.

Instead of positioning children’s engagement as a separate activity having little to do with the congregation, this building block helps a congregation fulfill its greater vision by structuring learning that connects children and families to the life and purpose of the larger congregation. It also helps a child grow and learn within what might be thought of as the Jewish neighborhood of the 21st century.

Building Block 4: Connections With The Larger Community

Congregations wouldn’t need capital campaigns if they had a dollar for every time someone in Jewish education said “linking the silos.” This phrase, made popular by Jack Wertheimer’s 2005 Avi Chai report, resonated with educational leaders. In the report, Wertheimer states, “The current challenge of Jewish education is to link the silos, to build cooperation across institutional lines and thereby enable learners to benefit from mutually reinforcing educational experiences.” (p. 2) Just as innovating congregations link learners experience to the norming context of the congregation, a number (at least 13 of the 23 whose models we analyzed) also are seeking to connect learning experiences to the larger Jewish community. To this end, some congregations are beginning to link children’s and families’ learning to Jewish summer camp experiences and to communal *tikkun olam* activities. These models reinforce the notion that Judaism is not an activity that takes place solely within the four walls of a synagogue.

Temple Israel Center (TIC), is working on linking the nine-month September-to-June experience with summer camp and *tikkun olam* activity in the community. In 2009 they launched a pilot for kindergarten families that includes an expectation for summer Jewish experience. While not able to fully enforce that expectation they do promote it in a number of ways. The congregation hosts a Jewish summer camp day so parents and children can learn about the options available to them.



A beneficiary agency of
UJA Federation
of New York



The Experiment in Congregational Education
A Project of The Rhea Hirsch School Of Education
Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion/Los Angeles
www.econline.org

Leadership Institute
FOR CONGREGATIONAL JEWISH EDUCATION

A joint program of Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion and the Jewish Theological Seminary
Funded by UJA Federation of New York

They also take advantage of an incentive program offered by the Foundation for Jewish Camp that provides \$1,000 needs-blind funding for first time campers.

TIC's new model also incorporates camp-style learning methods into their year round practice. Nancy Parkes, TIC's Educational Director, took teachers to Camp Ramah for a professional learning day. She charged teachers to witness, experience, and then try to incorporate the informal methods of education into their classrooms. TIC also brought camp counselors to the congregation to structure camp-like experiences for students. TIC's music curriculum now uses some of the same melodies as the local movement's day camp. Finally, families attended joint experiences at the local Jewish camp. Connecting experiential learning, using the same melodies and methodology, and training teachers in content and method creates a model that intentionally ties year-long Jewish learning to children's Jewish summer experience.

Avi Chai's research report, *Linking the Silos* (Wertheimer, *Linking the Silos: How to Accelerate the Momentum in Jewish Education Today*, 2005) explains the importance of this building block when trying to create an educational experience that positively impacts children. "A cluster of educational experiences," rather than an isolated or sporadic experience, "can powerfully reinforce Jewish identification." (p. 2) The report continues: "Much research suggests that the mix of Jewish educational experiences, the combination of formal and informal programs, has a differentiated effect on people as they grow. Children who attend supplementary school, but go on to post Bar/Bat Mitzvah schooling and youth groups or attend Jewish summer camps along with their supplementary schooling tend to be more actively engaged as Jews as they get older." (p. 31). When linked to other experiences, congregational education has an increased opportunity to fulfill its role as a partner in helping a child grow into an adult with a purposeful and meaningful Jewish life. Part-time Jewish education created with this building block can reinforce, accelerate and integrate a child's constellation of experiences over time. The role of the family, the role of the congregational community and the role of other engagements in the surrounding community—like summer camp—are all essential. When using this building block a congregation's educational model can play a unique role in extending the impact of isolated and potentially disparate experiences. Notably, TIC also seeks to connect children's learning to the larger community through *Tikkun Olam* involvement. For example, families participating in the Kindergarten pilot collected cans of food and delivered them to a shelter as part of their Rosh Hashanah learning. The classroom experience was designed to teach key terms and values. This extended learning to a campus of experiences beyond the walls of the congregation.

Building Block 5: New Teacher Roles and Expectations

Jeffrey Kress and Michael Ben Avie's **Educators in Jewish Schools Study** (2006) shined a light on the very limited exposure teachers in congregational education have to professional development. The study showed that less than half (47%) of teachers in congregational education hold a bachelors degree, and 59% of teachers have five or less years of experience. Even teachers with advanced degrees and years of experience require ongoing professional development in order to develop learning that reaches stated learner outcomes. Yet the vast majority of teachers in the EJSS study reported participating in professional development that lasted a half-day or less. One quarter of teachers attended a full day of professional learning.



A beneficiary agency of
UJA Federation
of New York



The Experiment in Congregational Education
A Project of The Rhea Hirsch School of Education
Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion/Los Angeles
www.econline.org

Leadership Institute
FOR CONGREGATIONAL JEWISH EDUCATION
A joint program of Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion and the Jewish Theological Seminary
Funded by UJA Federation of New York

Professional development hours for congregational educators fall far below recommended practices in secular education as well. The National Staff Development Council (NSDC), the leading national organization for teacher professional development in the country, advocates that school districts should dedicate at least ten percent of their budgets to staff development and that at least 25 percent of an educator's work time be devoted to learning and collaboration with colleagues (NSDC, 2010). According to the NSDC standard for professional development, teachers in congregational models that meet, as an example, four hours a week for 30 weeks, should engage teachers in professional learning and collaborative planning 30 hours a year. Nineteen of the 23 New York area congregations whose models we analyzed either meet or exceed this benchmark, which sharply differentiates them from the conventional practice of congregational education. These congregations recognize that creating a kind of learning that is not just for an event but rather for a way of living a Jewish life, requires ongoing professional learning. Still, a large gap remains between believing teacher education is important, and actually devoting the necessary resources to provide for it. Making this kind of commitment a reality requires new roles and expectations for teachers that involve them in new ways, not only as participants but also as planners and leaders in a variety of forms of professional learning.

Stephanie Hirsh, Executive Director of the NSDC wrote in “Teacher Learning: Sine Qua Non of School Innovation” (Hirsh, 2010):

Innovation that leads to continuing cycles of improvement will begin on a large scale only when teachers learn together and work collaboratively, using readily available data and pooling their collective expertise to address problems...Because it is a moral imperative that every student experience great teaching every day, it must be a policy imperative that we ground teaching in collaborative learning and teamwork, and support the notion of collective responsibility for student success.

Often educational leaders point to the part-time nature of congregational education and conclude that teachers don't have time for the kind of collaborative professional learning that Hirsh calls a moral imperative. Leaders often site a lack of time and energy to plan and teach professional learning. Myriad barriers have made the part-time system of congregational education into one that manages to get by on one-shot workshop teacher education. However, innovating congregations are demonstrating that, with some support, creative use of resources, and by establishing new roles for teachers, ongoing professional learning is a viable building block in 21st century models.

Temple Beth Sholom of Roslyn, is one congregation that made sure that new expectations for teachers to engage in professional development are part of their model, and not an add-on isolated event. When Temple Beth Sholom restructured their learning model for children and families to include Friday night, Saturday morning Shabbat family engagement and once-a-month Sunday family *Tikkun Olam* activities, they found that learner engagement time totaled one hour a week less than class time in their conventional model. At the time Temple Beth Sholom was participating in RE-IMAGINE Professional Learning, an ECE pilot project designed to equip and inspire congregations to create ongoing, outcome-oriented, vision-aligned professional learning for teachers. Since their teachers were already contracted for that hour, they



A beneficiary agency of
UJA Federation
of New York



The Experiment in Congregational Education
A Project of The Rhea Hirsch School Of Education
Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion/Los Angeles
www.econline.org

Leadership Institute
FOR CONGREGATIONAL SCHOOL EDUCATION

A joint program of Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion and the Jewish Theological Seminary
Funded by UJA Federation of New York

devoted the time instead to weekly professional learning. They do not consider it an option but rather an integral part of the model they have built. Now teachers at Temple Beth Sholom learn and plan jointly at least one hour a week.

Along with Temple Beth Sholom, 18 more of the 23 congregations whose models we analyzed (and several other congregations) have dedicated the time of a lead group of teachers to engage in at least 30 hours a year of professional learning as part of a Professional Learning Team (PLT) with the LOMED project. Jointly offered by BJENY/SAJES of Greater New York, the Experiment in Congregational Education (ECE) and the Leadership Institute of HUC and JTS, and funded by UJA-Federation of New York, LOMED supports these congregations in creating their PLT's who plan and design professional learning for the congregations' faculties. LOMED provides consulting support, a stipend for teacher time, and additional learning that supports congregations in establishing ongoing professional learning.

The story of Midway Jewish Center, a Conservative congregation on Long Island, with 264 children in grades K-7, illustrates how congregations are creating new expectations and roles for teachers. Midway is among the congregations that have created new roles for teachers with the establishment of a PLT and have replaced isolated sporadic teacher workshops with ongoing professional learning focused on achieving stated learner outcomes. Midway began experimenting with a new model three years ago when they changed from a three-day-a-week, child-centered classroom model to a two-day-a-week model with a wealth of additional components including family Shabbat *minyanim*, parent adult study, and family home- and synagogue-based Shabbat meals with Torah study. After creating a model with the building blocks of regular family engagement and situating learning in real life settings, Midway turned to changing the roles and expectations of their teachers.

Their first step was to add a new full time educator role, responsible for teaching in the real-life-centered learning and family engagement experiences (like Shabbat family *minyanim*) and charged with developing curriculum for their new model. Prior to this new role, only the educational director was full-time; all teachers were hired on a part-time basis. The new full time educator, known as the RE-IMAGINE Educator, has enabled the congregation to establish a more committed team responsible for family and children's education. While still responsible for moving innovations forward, the educational director receives support from the additional full-time staff resulting in a more focused staffing structure.

In addition to a new full time teacher role, Midway also created a PLT responsible for co-planning and co-facilitating professional learning for the entire staff. The congregation had never before asked teachers to help plan or lead professional learning for the staff. Prior to introduction of the new structure, teachers attended one or two half-day professional development experiences offered by the local central agency or the Conservative movement.

This past year, for the first time, the PLT met for 2½ hours each month working hand-in-hand with the leadership of the congregation to assess and expand the architecture of Jewish learning that they have begun. The senior rabbi, the president of the congregation, and a lay leader joined the PLT for these planning meetings. The PLT also was charged with co-planning and co-



A beneficiary agency of
UJA Federation
of New York



The Experiment in Congregational Education
A Project of The Rhea Hirsch School Of Education
Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion/Los Angeles
www.econline.org

Leadership Institute
FOR CONGREGATIONAL JEWISH EDUCATION
A joint program of Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion and the Jewish Theological Seminary
Funded by UJA-Federation of New York

facilitating eight hours of professional learning for the full teaching staff. At the writing of this article, the PLT has already scheduled 16 hours of staff professional learning for the coming year. The PLT also participates in four, four-hour communal gatherings with other PLT's responsible for creating professional learning for their staffs, and in two-and-a-half days of their own professional learning as an introduction to their new roles as teacher leaders. When added up, the three teachers on the PLT and the director of education each spent over 60 hours during the year in learning, co-planning and co-facilitating professional learning, exceeding by far the standards set by the NSDC. By creating new roles and expectations of their teachers as part of emerging new models, congregations are developing more committed staffs that are better equipped to work in emerging models and prepared to reach for the goals they've set for learners.

Building Block 6: Relationships Among Peers And Across Generations

Steve Cohen startled educators at the 2008 CAJE conference in Vermont when he said the best thing they could do to educate children for Jewish adulthood was to get children to play in Jewish soccer leagues (Hoffman, 2008). Cohen's message paraphrased was, "relationships, relationships, relationships."

Cohen notes that recent years have seen a significant decline in Jewish belonging, which he defines as "the extent to which Jews maintain social ties with other Jews. Jewish Belonging is not simply a means to a stronger Jewish identity; it is inherently a piece of Jewish identity. A Jew with Jewish spouse, children, friends, neighbors and co-workers is, ipso facto, Jewishly identified. Conversely, few but the most committed Jews in modern America can sustain strong Jewish identities in near-isolation, without the social networks that make Jewish living possible and plausible." (Cohen, 2008, p. 76) Woocher, Rubin Ross and Woocher (Redesigning Jewish Education for the 21st Century, 2008, p. 16) address "The power of relationships and the social experience of learning" as a critical design principle for Jewish education in the 21st century, saying:

Even in an age of technological wizardry where self-guided learning is as easy as a mouse click, personal relationships remain almost invariably at the core of our most memorable and impactful learning experiences. Jewish tradition sees the relationship of teacher and student as not only instrumentally important, but sacred... And, as Jewish tradition also recognizes, sometimes our most powerful teachers are our peers, a lesson that, again, social science theory and contemporary experience only reinforce.

Fourteen of the 23 congregations studied are experimenting with models that explicitly seek to aid children and families in building relationships among peers and/or across generations. The medium for building the relationships is expressly Jewish. People across ages participate in inter-generational Torah study and social action. Learning activities are deliberately structured to foster collaboration, story telling, and shared experience. Debbie Krivoy of Avodah Arts, an educational resource provider working with congregations to design learning that fosters



A beneficiary agency of
UJA Federation
of New York



The Experiment in Congregational Education
A Project of The Rhea Hirsch School of Education
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion/Los Angeles
www.econline.org

Leadership Institute
FOR CONGREGATIONAL JEWISH EDUCATION

A joint program of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and the Jewish Theological Seminary
Funded by UJA-Federation of New York

intentional relationships recently said, “Building relationships is not something you do in October so that everyone knows each other’s name. Check it off and say you’re done. Rather you have to carefully design learning so it continually builds and deepens caring relationships and shared experience throughout the year.” (LOMED Living and Learning Event, March 2010). To assure that relationship building is not an activity, but a building block of the model, congregations put in place structural supports. For example, North Shore Synagogue of Syosset, a Reform Congregation on Long Island with over 400 students, launched a new model called J.ello (Jewish Education Living and Learning Opportunities) for all K-2 grade families. This is not an optional model. The drop off model for these grades has ended. Combining the building blocks of family engagement, situating learning in real life settings, and changing teacher roles and expectations, they also created a model that builds relationships across the generations. Teens and seniors contribute to the success of J.ello. In 2009, the congregation started the RSVP project (Retired Senior Volunteer Program) to recruit senior members of the congregation in support of the J.ello initiative. Each J.ello class has a “bubbie” and “zayde” who act as classroom teachers or aides. So far the program tallies 18 members, with more coming onboard. Additionally, each J.ello classroom includes a teen *madrich* or *madricha*, modeling that their commitment to education extends beyond bar mitzvah.

Temple Beth Sholom of Roslyn has also built a model to assure relationship building. After a new model with multiple components (see description above), Temple Beth Sholom added another dimension to their new architecture: intergenerational learning. A number of parents expressed a desire know more about a particular area of Jewish life. Instead of starting a new class, TBS started a group of life coaches known as the *Morei Derech* (teachers of the path). Adults in the community are trained to serve as role models and mentors to families with children. A Legacy Heritage Innovation Project grant enabled the professional staff to create a preparatory year of deep Jewish learning for 15 adults in the community. Learning focused on enriching both Jewish knowledge and mentoring skills. In its second year, the model paired the *Morei Derech* with small *havurot* made up families known as *Dorshei Derech* (pursuers of the path). These small groupings study and celebrate holidays together.

Congregation Emanu-EL of Westchester, a Reform Congregation with 286 students in grades K-7 structured a similar model in which teens and seniors study the weekly Torah portion and sections from the Prophets with the rabbi. These volunteers learn basic pedagogy and then lead shared study with children in grades five to seven.

Not satisfied to hope that relationships will grow simply by providing unstructured social time, innovating congregations are deliberately designing models that foster a sense of belonging by purposefully creating meaningful relationships across the generations and among peers.

Building Block 7: Choice for learners

Cohen (2008, p. 78) states, “Since at least the 1980s social scientists have been observing Americans adopt a more independent, individualist stance toward institutions in general and toward religious life in particular (Bellah et al., 1985)... As described in **The Jew Within**



A beneficiary agency of
UJA Federation
of New York



The Experiment in Congregational Education
A Project of The Rhea Hirsch School of Education
Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion/Los Angeles
www.econline.org

Leadership Institute
FOR CONGREGATIONAL JEWISH EDUCATION

A joint program of Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion and the Jewish Theological Seminary
Funded by UJA Federation of New York

(Cohen and Eisen, 2000), we are witnessing the emergence of the Sovereign Jewish Self, in which American Jews feel perfectly comfortable deciding for themselves whether, when, where, why and how they will be Jewish.” Thus, a high degree of choice characterizes the new Jewish journey. Jews make autonomous choices, searching for that which they find personally meaningful.

New models of Jewish education seek to respond to this desire for and expectation of choice. Of the 23 congregations whose new models we analyzed for this paper, 14 offer learners choice either within their new models or between the new model and a more conventional one that continues to operate alongside.

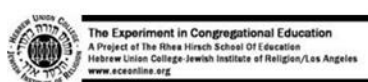
As if addressing directly the issue of religious practice as a matter of personal meaning rather than of compliance with law, tradition, or custom, several congregations offer their learners choices among several modalities of prayer in the context of their Jewish learning models. The Reconstructionist Synagogue of the North Shore now offer their students choices in how they learn and experience prayer time. Calling their prayer time for children *Tefilah breira* (prayer choice), children can choose among yoga, exercise, traditional prayer, art, and movement as distinct modalities through which to experience or interpret prayer.

Woocher, Ross and Woocher (Redesigning Jewish Education for the 21st Century, 2008, p. 14-15) advocate treating learners as “active agents” and “co-producers of their learning experiences,” implying that choice within the learning experience is a critical design principle for learning experiences in the 21st century. Innovating congregations are extending this notion of choice to the model level by structuring choices among different types of learning experiences. Some congregations offer choice between a conventional schooling model and a new, alternative model. Still others, like Temple Shaaray Tefila, a Reform congregation with 600 K-12 students in Manhattan are purposefully fashioning new models that provide multiple paths among which families can choose. The Masa (Journeys) model takes families on a series of year-long, family education experiences designed to “build community, engage participants in interactive learning, provide for choice and flexibility, and explore Jewish topics in a multigenerational context.” (Temple Shaaray Tefila, 2009) *Masa* “recognizes that there are different gates of entry and journeys available for Jewish learning [and] allows families to choose their gate and path. Families and students select how they wish to connect to Jewish life and Jewish living [by choosing among a series of] journeys of connection [which] meet families where they are and provide paths to take them where they want to go.” (Davids, 2009) The first two journeys, titled “Celebrations!” and “Shalom in the Home” deal, respectively, with “holiday activities, celebrations and worship” and with “Jewish life at home, including holiday celebrations, ritual objects and Jewish values.” (Temple Shaaray Tefila, 2009). Families can choose among these Journeys and the congregation expects *Masa* to expand to include several more journeys over the next five years.

As American Jews increasingly view themselves as autonomous seekers of meaningful and valuable experiences, they will demand choice in Jewish learning as in everything else. New models for the 21st century will need to offer learner choices both within and among learning models.



A beneficiary agency of
UJA Federation
of New York



Leadership Institute
FOR CONGREGATIONAL SCHOOL EDUCATION
A joint program of Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion and the Jewish Theological Seminary
Funded by UJA Federation of New York

The Next Decade: Building Blocks on the Horizon

In addition to the commonly shared design attributes among the models we studied, we could also identify isolated attributes that at least hint at building blocks we expect to see emerge as more prevalent in the coming years. Many of these represent under-developed opportunities to enrich and deepen the impact of the learning experience, increase variety and customization, or improve resource utilization. Some are not new in the sense that they exist somewhere today but are not as widely embraced and implemented as they might be. These emerging building blocks include:

1. Greater use of technology, both to learn skills such as Hebrew language decoding, and to facilitate ongoing connection and dialogue that builds upon face-to-face learning experiences;
2. More creative use of space outside the synagogue, including camps, museums, coffee houses, salon-type home learning, perhaps increasing led by well-prepared lay leaders;
3. Expanded choice for the individual learner, with more of the choices generated by the learner (e.g. to learn through art, music, movement, or other modalities);
4. Growth of self-structured learning networks and self-directed learning so that new configurations and meanings of "learners" and "teachers" emerge; and
5. Wider application of constructivist learning principles leading to a shift from content coverage to helping learners construct their own learning as a key tool in their search for meaning and a Judaism that they relate to their daily lives in contemporary society.

In sum, we expect to see congregations extend and expand their model-design creativity in variety of directions: models will incorporate more of the building blocks we have identified. More and more congregants will get involved in new models until they reach a tipping point at which more people will be engaged in new models than in old ones and the steady evolution of new models becomes normative rather than experimental. Next decade models will alter the architecture of congregations in increasingly systemic ways so that education is no longer an isolated activity that happens in one part of the building during certain hours. Rather, Jewish learning will become part of the fabric of what it means to be an identified Jew. Surely the building blocks we have identified are neither universal nor the full and definitive picture of what is yet to emerge. Yet they seem to indicate positive movement in important directions. If so, in ten years we will look back at this paper as a record of early work in progress.

References

- Aron, I. (1989). The Malaise of Jewish Education. *Tikkun* , 4 (3), 32-34.
- Aron, I., Cohen, S. M., Hoffman, L., & and Kelman, A. Y. (2009, Winter). Functional and Visionary Congregations. *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly* , 10-25.
- Benson, P. L. (2006). The Science of Child and Adolescent Spiritual Development: Definitional, Theoretical and Field Building Challenges. In E. C. Roehlkeparrrtain, P. Ebstynne King, L. Wagner, & P. L. Benson, *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence* (pp. 484-497). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.



A beneficiary agency of
UJA Federation
of New York



Leadership Institute
FOR CONGREGATIONAL JEWISH EDUCATION
A joint program of Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion and the Jewish Theological Seminary
Funded by UJA Federation of New York

Boyatzis, C. J., Dollahite, D. C., & Marks, L. D. (2006). The Family as a Context for Religious and Spiritual Development in Children and Youth. In E. C. Roehlkeparrrtain, P. Ebstyn King, L. Wagner, & P. L. Benson, *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence* (pp. 297-309). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Carr, A. A., Jonassen, D. H., Marra, R. M., & Litzinger, M. E. (1998). Good Ideas To Foment Educational Revolution: The Role of Systemic Change in Advancing Situated Learning, Constructivism, and Feminist Pedagogy. *Educational Technology* , 38 (1), 5-15.

Cohen, S. M. (2008). Identity and Jewish Education. In R. L. Goodman, P. A. Flexner, & L. D. Bloomberg (Eds.), *What we Now Know About Jewish Education* (pp. 75-85). Los Angeles, CA: Torah Aura Productions.

Community Synagogue of Rye. (n.d.). *Home: Community Synagogue*. Retrieved April 9, 2010, from Community Synagogue Web site: <http://comsynrye.org/>

Davids, M. (2009, January 27). Masa: Celebrations Journey 2008. Nashville, Tennessee.

Hirsh, S. (2010, February 17). Teacher Learning: Sine Qua Non of School Innovation. *Education Week* , 29(22).

Hoffman, J. (2008, August 18). *Some Results from the Roundtable Fishbowl*. Retrieved April 12, 2010, from CAJE 33: <http://caje33.wordpress.com/2008/08/18/some-results-from-the-roundtable-fishbowl/>

Kress, J., & Ben Avie, M. *Educators in Jewish Schools Study: Preliminary Findings From A Registry Of Day And Congregational/Supplemental Schools*. JESNA, The Learning & Development Initiative for Jewish Educational Change. New York: JESNA.

Senge, P. M., Scharmer, C. O., Jaworski, J., & Flowers, B. S. (2004). Awakening Faith in an Alternative Future: A Consideration of Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future. *Reflections: The SoL Journal of Knowledge, Learning, and Change* , 5 (7), 1-11.

Temple Shaaray Tefila. (2009, Summer). *REIMAGINING EDUCATION AT SHAARAY TEFILA*. Retrieved April 13, 2010, from Shaaray Tefila: http://shaaraytefilanyc.org/uploads/21838MASA_Summer_2009.pdf

The Jewish Week. (2009).

The Lookstein Center. (2010). *Online Journal*. Retrieved April 2010, from www.lookstein.org/online_journal.php?id=245



Weinberg, R. (2008). Finding New Models: Alternatives to Religious School. In R. L. Goodman, P. A. Flexner, & L. D. Bloomberg (Eds.), *What we Now Know About Jewish Education* (pp. 499-506). Los Angeles, CA: Torah Aura Productions.

Wertheimer, J. (2008). *A Census of Jewish Supplementary Schools in the United States 2006 – 2007*. New York: The Avi Chai Foundation.

Wertheimer, J. (Ed.). (2009). *Learning and Community*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press.

Wertheimer, J. (2005). *Linking the Silos: How to Accelerate the Momentum in Jewish Education Today*. New York: The Avi Chai Foundation.

Woocher, J. (1995). Toward a "Unified Field Theory" of Jewish Continuity. In I. Aron, S. Lee, & S. Rossel (Eds.), *A Congregation of Learners: Transforming the Synagogue Into A Learning Community* (pp. 14-55). New York, New York: UAHC Press.

Woocher, J., Rubin Ross, R., & Woocher, M. (2008). *Redesigning Jewish Education for the 21st Century*. Lippman Kanfer Institute. New York: Jewish Education Service of North America.



A beneficiary agency of
UJA Federation
of New York



The Experiment in Congregational Education
A Project of The Rhea Hirsch School Of Education
Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion/Los Angeles
www.econline.org

Leadership Institute
FOR CONGREGATIONAL SCHOOL EDUCATION
A joint program of Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion and the Jewish Theological Seminary
Funded by UJA Federation of New York